

[Letter from Woody Guthrie to Alan Lomax, January 22, 1941]

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Columbia, Calif., Jan. 22, 1941

Howdy Alan

Well I guess the new car fever has wore down just a little bit but it aint run into the New York fever yet, and I feel pretty sure that it wont. Come through about 16 new states on the way out here. Drawed a purty big horse shoe curve on the U.S. road map as you will notice if you draw a line from New York down through Georgia, Alabama, Miss., La., Tex., New Mex., Ariz., Nevada, and on over into northern Calif. This is a good country with a real history to back it uOp. Some feller found a train load of loose gold right out here south of the house a few hundred feet. He must of let the word get out because in just a few days the population took a jump up to 6000 and then right away to about 16000. Had 42 banks here in town at one time and they weighed out more than 180,000,000 dollars worth of gold. It must of been a good town. It took 42 banks to bust it. They got a Wells Fargo Express office just acrost the street here. They got the old set of scales thatthey outweighed the miners with. Everything around here is a antique. Even the young girls are old. Dogs around here caint bark a lick till they get up around 40. I asked an old hard rock miner how long he'd been around here and he pointed out acrost the mountains to some great high pine trees andhe said Do you see them there trees over yonder,? And I told him I did and he said, Well boy when I hit town here, them pines was just a purty fair sized weed patch. They got three old Fire engines here that's been around the horn and they can throw a stream of water 75 foot. Some of these placer miners has been around the bar and they can throw a string of bull further than that. You got to pump the fire engines but not the prospectors. I like this country fine. I been out chopping hard oak timber and

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liked to of worked the tail off of me. Then went out today on a prospecting round and my cousin slid into the Stanislaus river off from a mossy rock. The water is from melted snow and coldern old Billy Hell. We clumb a straight up mountain and I got hung up on a clift and I couldn't get up and I couldn't get down and I couldn't get sideways and I was just hung up there between what you might call a rock and hard place. I still dont know how the hell I got down. Managed for this portable in El Paso for ten dollars off of one of Mary's brothers. It's a good one. I usually get to him for something or other. This out of doors living is what I like. This is a high and dry altitude but it's been a raining right here lately. At one time or other they took a high pressure water hose in here and washed all of the rocks down to get the loose gold out. And for miles andmiles up and down the country here you can trace the washout and the big granite boulders and see which a way they went. The best I got it figured they went back towards NewYork City with the gold and out towards Frisco with the water hose. I'm a reading my aunts bible and my cousins book on How & Where to Find Gold and if I dont find the gold well the bible dont speak so dam good of the stuff nohow. This home cooked grub around here is what gets me. Usually after a hard day of thrashing around over these here rocks you come in and you got a big pot of pinto beans and a pan of good rough corn bread and a bowl of butter and a big onion and a good hot cup of black coffee and I will state that as I looked all over the eastern seaboard for a pan of cornbread worth calling cornbread, I have located the real unsweetened, Heaven Intended Cornbread out here made under the super directions of my oldest father's sister and she dont put no sugar in it and ruin it and gum it all up and this may be the mainest thing that will keep me away from New York inasmuch as you dont have to ring no chimes in a cussed cafeteria or play no slot machinesin them Automatic Cafes befor you can get a bite to eat. I won everything up there except something I liked and never remeber of getting a knife that would cut the meat. As far as music goes around here I am enjoying the shortage of it. I dont mean that like it sounds. I mean I am glad to be where you dont hear one of the jute boxes a going full blast through every window. They got a little dance hall across the street. They got a bnad of some kind in there that aint no good. A tramp musician is almost a welcomed guest out here. The saloons in some of the mining towns

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around here are fixed up with nickel boxes but I've walked into them and asked the boss man how about knocking off a few tunes to pick up a stake and seen him turn the nickel box face to the wall and tell me to do the best I could. This is the mother lode country of the 49 rush. It's full of mines of all sorts and sizes and 2 you caint look out across the mountains around here without seeing two or three little old shacks a sticking up on the side of one. Them old boyshas got a little hole drilled back in the mountain and they're up there doing all right with a long handle shoved and a good pick and a wheelbarrow as I was over to a Italian trading post just over the ridge and seen one old boy in there that had drove a Model T 24 miles over a slick one way road to get two bits worth of P.A., and two bottles of hand made wine, and a dollars worth of dynamite. He's keeping busy. He dont want to keep too busy. This god dam mining can run into work pretty dam quick if you get in a hurry and try to wind too much of it up in too short a time. That same feller could of bought him twenty dollars worth of dynamite but if he had of he wouldnt of had no excuse to come into town for tobaccer and wine, and besides its a big fat Italian widow woman running the trading post and I think he likes her heater. It come around the horn. She's got a piano th that come around the horn too. I think she gets her beer around the horn. Everything up here comes around the horn. Hell next time you see me I might not be able to take a slug of whiskey less'n its been around the dam horn. We bought a dimes worth of cheese over here at Angels Camp last Tuesday and I know dam good and well that it didn't make it around the horn. They hadn found that horn when that cheese was made. I got a sneaking idea that some of these mountain women around here has been around the horn. That was a good subject but I'm about to wear it out. How's Javella? Fine I hope. W We're all right for he shape we're in. The wife feels better out here but she likes New York City paychekcs better than what I been able to carve out of the mountains so far. She just wasn't in New York long enough to get right good and sick of it. She never was around there when she was that broke and she aint got no idea of how far you can smell the garbage that folksthrows out of their windows over therein that low rent district. I rather to raise my kids like a herd of young antelope out here in the fresh air. Maybe that's wrong but I feel that a way about it. Everything around here is good and clean and fresh and

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natural and if you aint got a bag of money in the big city it's a lowdown rotten joint to get caught in. We went up 7123 feet high coming over the pass the other day after dark and it was snowed under and the moon was hanging out and I just had to throw on th brakes and stop the car and get out and just stand there and look and think — man that was a pretty sight for sore eyes. Old Wild Bill's got his boots off now and he's up in the bed with a piece of bread and molasses in his hand and a falling all aroundover the covers till I know they'll be stuck together so tight that you caint crawl out of bed in the morning... Hows Nick and his wife and old Tony? Tell them I'll write them a letter the first time the notion strikes me. Tell the Gates and Burl and Earl and Pete and Dave and everybody I said howdy. Sure a fine bunch of fellers. If I was twins so that I could be up there and on the road at the same time but the way it is it looks like it's got to be the road. The cops see me with no shave and this purty car and they stop me about every four miles and look over all of the papers and stuff and they say they still dont believe it but it rattles their brain and they boost me over into the next county and another bunch takes in after me and lots of times I got so many standin around a reading them papers that I wish I was a selling bade polish or belt oil or 45 grease of sme cheap grade I could pick up a few nickels. I got two carbon copiesof all of the papers and have dam near it wore out the car windows rolling them up and down to hand out papers. We slept in the car on the way out here and the wife drove and I would sleep and I would drive and she would sleep and then both of us would drive and sleep and we got along pretty fast. Bills got a big Washington state hard apple bigger than he is. I hope he dont fall off of it. He's a cutting four or five teeth all at the same time. He might come a draggina a half et deer in home any day now. We found a half et calf down the trail thismorning. It looked like the works of a cougar. Adam and Eve and Pinch Me went down to the river to swim, Adam and Eve got drownded and who was saved? Pinch Me. So long for a while. How's the High Dives of American Fulk Songs, fillin up? I been a workin' in a tailin pile, find a little pice every once in a while, honey, babe of mine. Woody. Love and Kisses.